



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### THE USE OF GAMES TO PROMOTE COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS IN EFL: THE CASE OF 10TH GRADERS AT PADRE BUILU SCHOOL-CABINDA

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#### ABSTRACT

This study deals with the use of games to promote communicative skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It results from the problem statement that follows: teachers do not use the best methods or techniques in order to teach the English language. They do not use techniques that really meet the pupils' needs. The study investigates the effectiveness of using games in the teaching/learning English as a Foreign Language. It aims at finding out whether this teaching technique helps learners to effectively learn English and well remember new words and structures. The sample of this study was made of 5 teachers and 45 tenth grade pupils at Padre Builu one of Secondary schools in Cabinda. Using the qualitative method, the researcher used questionnaires and classroom observation in order to collect data. At the end of the research, most of pupils acknowledged the importance of using games in classroom. The results proved that while using games, learners unconsciously learn grammar structures and new words; learners' participation in the lesson is encouraged, interaction among the learners is promoted, etc. In the light of these findings, the researcher really recommends the use of games to all teachers of English in Cabinda. They will arouse interest in learning and help pupils to make noticeable progress in English language learning.

#### INTRODUCTION

Learners need to study in a relaxed classroom atmosphere the one which includes interest in how the actions of learners might affect their acquisition of language. In this respect, the integration of games as a teaching technique proves its effectiveness in the context of foreign language learning. Indeed, research on the importance of educational games reveals that they are beneficial and help to effectively achieve higher objectives. Pupils at Padre Builuschool in particular, and in Cabinda Secondary schools in general are not very keen on learning the English language. Many of them say English is a very difficult language to learn. One of the reasons is teachers do not use the best methods or techniques in order to teach this language. They do not use techniques that really meet the pupils' needs. Using games is point of what is technically called edutainment, I mean, educate through entertainment. And this research paper is certainly the best answer to this problem. The experiment I have carried on at Padre BuiluSchool has shown that pupils really love using games when learning English. Most of them loved my classes and made good progress on the course. This research paper attempts to examine the effectiveness of using games in the teaching/learning English as a Foreign Language. It aims at finding out whether this teaching technique helps in leading

learners to effective learning and helps to remember new words and structures. To achieve this aim, two research instruments were used: a questionnaire and a classroom observation. Questionnaires were designed by the researcher and handed to teachers and pupils. This instrument contained structured questions to which students and teachers provided their answers about the use of games in the language classroom. Moreover, the classroom observation was set in order to obtain more direct, real and accurate data on what goes on when explaining and practicing the English language using games. The data processing method used in this research is qualitative. When this much has been said, it becomes useful to state that three research questions guide the present research as whole. They are:

- Can games promote learners' communicative skills?
- How do games promote learners' communicative skills?
- Do Secondary School teachers use games while teaching?

The results obtained from this investigation answer the research questions and reveal that while using games, learners unconsciously learn grammar structures and new words, learners' participation in the lesson is encouraged, interaction among learners is promoted, etc. In fact, games are a useful means to attract and motivate pupils for teaching a foreign language.

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## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON GAMES

**Definition of Games:** The word “game” appears to be simple and easy to define. But its complexity seems to have made it impossible for researchers to give one clear definition of the term. However, they still tried to define it. The few definitions of the word “game” found during the research process are given here. A game is, according to Wright, Batteridge and Buckby (2006: 1-2), an activity which is entertaining and engaging, often challenging, and in which people play and usually interact with others. It is described by Hadfield (1990) as an activity with rules, an aim and an element of fun. Quoting Kamila Palánová (2010:8), Prodromou (1992:120) defines a game as “an enjoyable activity involving an objective that is achieved by following certain rules, usually in competition with one or more other people”. Talak-kiryk (2010:4) gives a definition of games as follows:

Games are fun activities that promote interaction, thinking, learning, and problem-solving strategies. Often, games have an aspect that permits the players to produce information in a short time period. Some games require the players to engage in a physical activity and/or complete a mental challenge. Besides, Ur (1999) assumes that “game activities provide pleasurable tension and challenge through the process of attaining some fun goal. They can transform a boring class into a challenging one”.

*Oxford Advanced Learners' dictionary (2005)* defines game as an activity or sport with rules in which people or teams compete against each other. All the above definitions considered, it can be concluded that games suggest the idea of fun and competitions.

**The significance of games:** It has been said that a game is usually undertaken for fun. But sometimes, it is used as an educational tool. Therefore, the importance of games should be looked here from two points of views: as an activity undertaken for enjoyment and as an educational tool. For the sake of limiting the scope of this research, consideration will be given to games as educational tools. Research appeared in recent years has documented the importance of games. In the classroom, games provide motivation, lower students' stress, and give them opportunity for real communication. Being both amusing and challenging at the same time, games highly motivates learners. Rinvolutri (1984) quoted by Fitzgerald (2015:773) sides with what precedes when he writes that games help and encourage many learners, not only children, to maintain their interest. In this point of view, games can be seen as activities that enable the teacher to capture the learners' attention to what is being taught in the classroom. Ahmed and Ziyad (2012: 22) write the following on the relevance of games in classroom: “games are certain activities used as powerful icebreakers in the classroom and as motivating power for learners in accomplishing the class activities and revising the difficult material”. Besides, Ur (1999) assumes that “game activities provide pleasurable tension and challenge through the process of attaining some fun goal. They can transform a boring class into a challenging one”. In the foreign language teaching context too, games present many benefits. Khairiyah (2011:18), for instance, commented on the benefits of games as follows:

Games have become crucially important in language teaching for English language learning because they provide enjoyment

and encouragement that help the learners use the language in a creative communicative manner. In brief, Khairiyah says that games are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings. Moreover, Deguang Zhu (2012:802) states that using games in English class can get students relaxed and enjoy using the language. In regard with what precedes, Wright et al. (2006:2) see games to do more than just helping learners study language. As they say: ‘games provide one way of helping the learners to experience language rather than merely study it’. These authors believe that besides providing the key features of “drill” with the added opportunity to sense the working of language as living communication, games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. El-Shamy (2001:10) cited by Talak-kiryk has found that games enhance repetition, reinforcement, retention and transfer. He likewise adds that “They [games] can be useful to enhance students' proficiency and help them meet their goals, and at least to try new things in teaching”. It is known that Second Language Acquisition is influenced by affective factors either positively or negatively. In a sense, games create a situation where students' affective filter is lowered so that the comprehensible input could be facilitated (Krashen, 1982). As it is clear from what has been said above, games play an essential role in developing the learners' abilities.

**Using games in the classroom: some advantages:** This point deals with the advantages of using games in the language classroom. As a matter of fact, the educational value of games has been recognized in many experienced textbook and methodology manual writers. Amato (1996:192), for instance, believes that games are fun but warns against overlooking their pedagogical value, particularly in the foreign language teaching. This assertion aligns with Kim's (1979:2) who argues that games should be treated as central not peripheral to the foreign language teaching programme. Wright et al. (2006) say the following about the use of games in the language classroom:

...that language learning is hard to work and... Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work. Ernoz (2000) also agrees that language learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. In this vein, he suggests that “constant effort is required to understand, produce, and manipulate the target language”. Still, Ernoz mentions that games should be well chosen because “well chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow them to practice language skills. The same point is also made by Kim who thinks that people's perception that learning should not be fun is a fallacy. In this way, he opines:

There is a common perception that all learning should be serious and solemn in nature and that if one is having fun and there is hilarity and laughter, then it is not really learning. This is a misconception. It is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. One of the ways of doing this is through games.

**The author mentions therefore the following advantages of using games in the classroom:**

- Games are welcome break from the usual routine of the language class.
- Learning a language requires a great deal of effort. Games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning.
- Games are motivating and challenging.
- Games provide language practice in the various skills-speaking, writing, listening, and reading.
- Games encourage students to interact and communicate.
- Games create a meaningful context for language use.

#### **Some disadvantages of using games in classroom:**

Besides the many advantages of using games in the classroom, there are also disadvantages. Arguments that go against the use of games in the classroom, and particularly in the language classroom relate to such aspects as the games' competitive nature, the time span and many others. As a matter of fact, there are people who oppose using games in the classroom because of its nature of competition. They feel that games create a hostile learning environment. Indeed, when playing games, learners are trying to win or to beat other teams on the behalf of their team. This, however, creates a negative feeling on the part of the team that has lost. In the whispers game for instance, learners are so competitive to win first. The role of the teacher here is to constantly remind the learners how to treat each other in class, also explain to them the exact goal of the game. As Talak-kiryk (2010:16) puts it, winning should never be the focus or goal of the game. All the above comments and explanations show that using games in the classroom is not appropriate at all times. Games require the teacher to be careful. The learners may frequently prompt the teacher to play a game whenever possible, and a large number of learners may feel that they are not learning at all. They may feel unhappy if they perceive the classroom as being a place where they are playing too much; they feel that there is time wasted, and it concerns them.

## **METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**

**Population and sample:** As a refresher, one is working with one Cabinda Secondary School named 'Padre Builu'. The sample of the study comprises five teachers and forty-five 10<sup>th</sup> graders selected from three different options, that is, 'project design, electronics and telecommunication, and petrochemistry. It should be mentioned that in the sampling, the researcher considered both males and females.

**Research Methodology:** This present point of the research focuses on the research methodology— which is the overall strategy that one may choose to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical manner. In fact, this research presents itself as mainly qualitative as it studies the topic from teachers and pupils' opinions. The calculation of the percentage of score was made using the formula  $P = \frac{Fo}{N} \times 100\%$ , that is, the total number of choices directed to an option was divided by the total sample number, and then its result was multiplied by the permanent number or by using the whole percentage. The symbols used in the calculation are P, Fo, and N and they respectively stand for Percentage, frequency observed, and the total number of sample. The permanent number is 100%.

**Data collection instruments:** In this study, the data were collected through a classroom observation and questionnaires. Both data collection modes are described in the coming lines.

**Classroom observation:** For the classroom observation, one has prepared an observation scheme which consisted of two sections. The first section was meant to collect detailed description of the institution and of the class to be observed. It includes school name, the teachers' name, the level, the total number of pupils, the date and the time/period. The second section consisted of 11 questions which are related to their game use in the classroom. The questions are also designed to observe how teachers teach English using games in the classroom. Other aspects as to the involvement of learners in the learning process, the suitability of game for a given lesson, and how successful games are in teaching of English. Extra sheets of paper have been used to note down some other important aspects concerning classroom observation. It should also be noted that the main aim of playing the game in language teaching classes, over and above all, is learning the foreign language. In this regard, the researcher suggested some games to the investigated teachers and observed how they were played and what their outcomes were as far as the learning of English is concerned. During the observation, the researcher noticed that playing games made the learners' involvement in the learning process to be active. Also, pupils could communicate in English and communicate about the games they were playing (strategies, clues, etc.). In this way, some new words were learned.

**Questionnaires:** The second research instrument used in here is a questionnaire. What is a questionnaire then? A questionnaire is a data collection mode that contains a set of questions intending to elicit some answers on a certain topic. Questionnaires designed by the researcher carry structured questions in which students and teachers provided their answers about the use of games in the language classroom. As one understands from what precedes, two questionnaires were designed by the researcher: the teachers' and the learners'. Both the teachers' questionnaire and the learner' questionnaires consist of two parts— one that is to record personal details about the respondents and another that comprises a set of multiple choice questions. All the questions are, therefore, about games and its use in the classroom. The pupils' questionnaire has eleven questions and is designed in Portuguese to ensure understanding from all the respondents. The teachers' questionnaire, on the other hand, is designed in English and has fourteen questions.

**Administration of the questionnaire:** It should be reminded that this research investigates both teachers and pupils. For pupils, 10<sup>th</sup> graders at Padre Builu School in Cabinda were selected. After these pupils had been instructed properly, the questionnaires were distributed to them. Then the questions in the pupils' questionnaire were explained to them for the convenience of their better understanding. After that, the respondents were asked to tick or cross the most appropriate answer against each question in the questionnaire. English teachers were also investigated. Once they have been selected, they were requested to fill in the questionnaire. And, after they had completed those, the questionnaires were collected from them.

Table 1. Results from classroom observation

N°	Questions	Yes	No	More or less
1.	Are the learners interested to get involved to the lesson?	✓		
2.	Do the learners participate in the lesson actively?	✓		
3.	Is the class interactive?	✓		
4.	Are the learners motivated?	✓		
5.	Is the class communicative?	✓		
6.	Do learners use the target language?	✓		
7.	Is the game appropriate to the topic?	✓		
8.	Can new words be introduced?	✓		
9.	Do learners enjoy the lesson?	✓		
10.	Is the class noisy?	✓		
11.	Do learners face difficulties to understand and use the game?		✓	

Table 2. The teachers' answers to the questionnaire (out of 5)

N°	Items					
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1.	Games are both fun and useful to teach English the English language.	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%
2.	Games should be given a special role in EFL class.	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%
3.	Games encourage, entertain, teach and promote fluency.	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%
4.	Using games in EFL class can promote learners' interaction.	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%
5.	Using games in EL class can lower learners' anxiety.	0%	60%	0%	0%	40%
6.	Games foster learners' participation in the lesson.	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%
7.	Games are highly motivating and interesting.	20%	80%	0%	0%	0%
8.	Through games, learners can learn grammar structures unconsciously.	40%	40%	20%	0%	0%
9.	Games could improve learners' speaking and listening skills.	20%	80%	0%	0%	0%
10.	New words can be introduced while playing games.	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%
11.	Learners find difficulties to learn when using games.	0%	0%	0%	60%	40%
12.	Using games in class is a waste of time.	0%	0%	0%	60%	40%
13.	It is difficult to find appropriate games for each topic.	20%	40%	0%	20%	20%

(Source: research field done by researcher)

Table 3. The teachers' answers to question 14

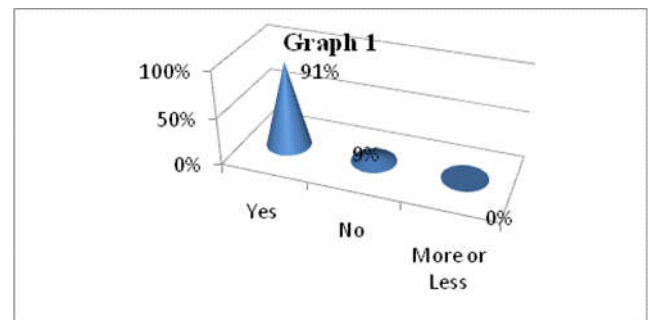
N°	Items	Never	Sometimes	Always
14	Games are frequently used in my EFL class.	20%	80%	0

(Source: research field done by researcher)

Data presentation

**On the classroom observation:** It has been stated in the introduction that the classroom observation was set in order to obtain more direct, real and accurate data on what goes on when explaining and practicing the English language games. In addition, this observation substantiates and supplements the research questionnaire. Its main purpose is to serve as the basis for the triangulation of inquiries. The Table that follows presents the results obtained through this classroom observation. It will be followed by short explanation with a view to illuminate its content. It should be said in advance that all the questions concealed in the Table below relate to the teaching of English through games.

It can be inferred from the above Table that for almost every question there was a positive answer. For example, the result of the question one coincides with that of the item four in the questionnaire and show that using games in class arises learners' interest to participate in the lesson. The answer to the question eight informs that new words can be introduced while playing games. To the question seeking to whether or not pupils were motivated, the results of the classroom observation were revealed. For visual representation of the preceding observation, the reader is referred to graph 1 below.



(Source: research field done by researcher)

**On the questionnaire:** The results of the teachers' questionnaire are analysed in terms of percentage and presented in Table 2 below. It should be noted that question 14 is analysed apart due to the fact that it does not offer the same choices as the remaining questions. Its results are presented in Table 3.

**Data analysis:** The results obtained from the questionnaire are interpreted here so that the readers of this paper could have a better understanding. It should be said that the results of the teachers' questionnaire are interpreted in tables and the results of the learners' questionnaire are interpreted in graphs. It should also be noted, at this level, that the findings of this research are the answers to the research questions. However, the research questions are proven through the answers

provided by the investigated respondents of this research. It is important, therefore, that the readers of this research be reminded that research questions for this research include: (1) Can games promote learners' communicative skills? (2) How do games promote learners' communicative skills? And (3) Do Secondary school teachers use games while teaching?. An interpretation of the questionnaire administered to teachers opens, therefore, the analysis. It should be reminded that the teachers' questionnaire contained a set of 14 questions regarding the use of games in the classroom, 13 of which present the same options. The results obtained have been presented in the above table, which comprises 7 columns from left to right. The first column indicates the number of the question, the second plots the items/questions themselves. Columns 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 indicate respectively such options as strongly agree, agree, neutral (or moderate), strongly disagree and disagree. The researcher believes that an explanation of the first item will pave the way to the understanding of how all the remaining items were analyzed. In fact, for the first item of the teachers' questionnaire, out of 5 respondents, 4, that is, 80% of the teachers strongly agreed that games are both fun and useful to teach English. The remaining 20% simply agreed.

**The learners' results (out of 45):** As far as the first question of the learners' questionnaire is concerned, with a sample composed of 45 pupils, all the 45 respondents, that is, 100% have chosen the option "agree". It means that pupils like games and they learn new words when playing games in the classroom. Therefore, using games in classroom is important in developing pupils' vocabulary. Graphically, the results are presented as follows.



(Source: research field done by researcher)

The second question of the pupils' questionnaire sought to see whether or not games are both fun and useful to teach the English language. In fact, out of 45 respondents, 44 respondents (97.8%) answered positively. Yet, one pupil, that is, 2.2% of the sample responded negatively. Consider graph 2 which plots the above interpretation.



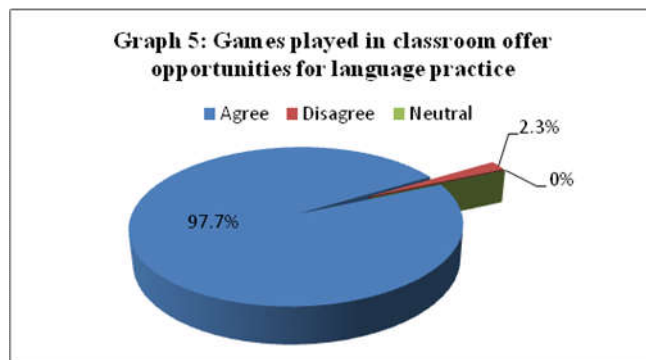
(Source: research field done by researcher)

Regarding the third question, whose aim was to verify if pupils are motivated to learn when playing games in the classroom, 45 respondents (100%) answered chose those option "agree". No other option was chosen for this item. The teacher is therefore advised to use games in the classroom for motivational purposes. For the fourth question, 42 pupils out of 45, that is to say, 93.3% of the sample agreed that the use of games in the classroom arouses interest for English. Of the 45 pupils, 2 pupils' answers were moderate. These pupils, representing 4.4%, chose the option neutral. Only 1 pupil (2.2%) has chosen the option "disagree". The prevalence of the first option, that is, "agree" makes it clear that using games in the classroom arouses the interest for learning English. The case is depicted in the graph that follows.



(Source: research field done by researcher)

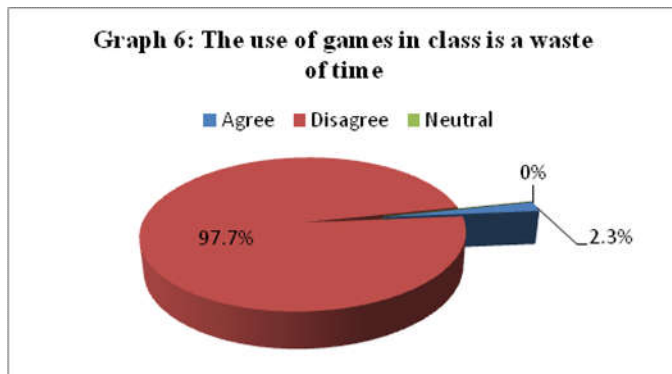
The pupils' answers to the fifth question and particularly their prevalent choice of the option agree reveal that games played in the classroom offer opportunities for language practice. In fact, out of 45 respondents, only 1 (2.3%) answered negatively. The other 97.7% (44 respondents) answered positively to this question. It therefore follows that the choice by one pupil of the option "disagree" relates to his/her own perception of games.



(Source: research field done by researcher)

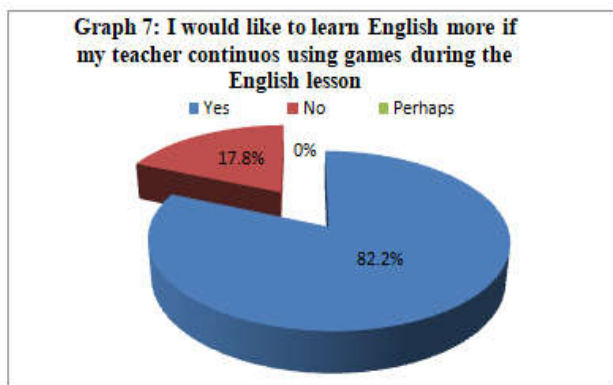
For visual representation of the preceding observation, the reader is referred to graph 5 below. The sixth question aimed at verifying whether or not using games encourages learners' participation in the lesson. To this question, most respondents (37, that is, 82.2%) said yes, that is, they agree. Other 17.8% of answers were equally divided between disagree (8.9%) and neutral (8.9%). Concerning the seventh question, 38 respondents (84.4%) answered positively. Some pupils (2.2%) said disagree while 13.4% of pupils' answers were neutral. It is clear, then that learners are encouraged to speak English in a friendly environment. As far as the eighth question, which sought to verify if pupils find games difficult to play, 41 respondents (91.1%) answered chose the option disagree.

Other 8.9% of answers were divided between agree (6.6%) and neutral (2.3%). A close examination of the pupils' answers to the ninth question shows that 44 respondents, representing 97.7% of the whole sample said No (that is, they disagree) that using games in class is a waste of time. Only one (2.3%) pupilticked the option agree. For visual representation of this observation, the reader is referred to graph 6 below. The aim behind the tenth question was to see whether or not the English teacher frequently uses games in the classroom. The results arrived at isunsatisfactory. Out of a total sample consisted of 45 respondents, 42 (93.3%) chose the option never. The remaining 6.6% of the sample has chosensometimes.



(Source: research field done by researcher)

It should be reminded here that the sample of this research was drawn from three different options of the same level. The high percentage of never shows that the English teachers do not use games in the classroom. The eleventh and last question sought to see if pupils would like to learn English more if the teacher continues using games during the English lesson. It should be noted that the larger share of the sample, that is, 37 pupils (82.2%) out of 45 responded **Yes** to this question. The remaining 8 pupils, that is, 17.8% responded negatively to this question. Consider graph 7which plots the above interpretation.



(Source: research field done by researcher)

## RECOMMENDATION

This point comes as appended information on the preceding point. In fact, it deals with the methodology, that is, the preparation and procedure for using games in the classroom.

**Preparation:** Having decided which game to use and when to use it, the teacher must prepare the game thoroughly. Games may be good fun but they need to be carefully prepared and organized. Before a game is used with a class the teacher must be sure that the necessary facilities (e.g. overhead projector) are available.

If visuals or cards are to be made, these must be clear and legible and attractively presented so that students feel the teacher has put some effort into the work. Sloppy writing or scrappy pieces of card will not motivate the student to take the teacher's intentions seriously. In some cases additional material will be required for students (e.g. magazines, rulers, pens, papers...), and spare sets should be available for those students without any. The teacher must then work out how the game is to progress, what students will need to do, and how they will be instructed in what to do.

**Procedure:** The teacher must ensure that very clear instructions are given before and during the game so that students, who in any case have language difficulties, do not become confused. It may therefore sometimes be appropriate to give instructions in the mother tongue. Wherever possible, the teacher should give a demonstration of what is to be done as an expansion of the verbal instructions. Any key language and/or instructions could be clarified by writing them on the blackboard.

**Using games with small and large groups:** The type of techniques a teacher uses also depends on a class size. The class size influences games which can be utilized. It is known that each game suggest which form of class organization is appropriate. Grouping learners in small or large groups is very important if each learner is to have sufficient oral practice in the use of the language. However, it is worth to say that what we call small or large group depends on how the teacher organizes the class. For instance, small group can be with three, four or five people, but all depending on the question discipline. Seligson (1997:42) states that the smaller the group, the easier it is for the learners to maintain self-control. Furthermore, the bigger the group, the more difficult it becomes to control. For example if the teacher makes a group of seven pupils, it will be difficult for him to control them. Thus, it is better to group pupils in four which is the maximum recommended by most authors. Additionally, when working in groups, many teachers also consider it is advisable to have a group leader. Hence, there is much to be said for encouraging a learner by giving the responsibility to him or her. The leader's role is to ensure that the game or the activity is properly organized and to act as an intermediate between learners and the teacher. Nevertheless, the idea of working with small groups is better than the large ones because it facilitates the learners' leader to concentrate on the activity and intermediate between learners and teachers.

## CONCLUSION

The use of games to promote communicative skills is the title under which this paper has been written. As it is clear from the title, the aim behind conducting this piece of research was to investigate the effectiveness of integrating games as a foreign language teaching/learning technique. The research questions that guided the research were: (a) Can games promote learners' communicative skills? (b) How do games promote learners' communicative skills? And (c) Do Secondary School teachers use games while teaching? These questions were linked to the assumption that using games in the classroom would help to leadpupils to unconsciously learn new grammar structures and words, and therefore, develop communicative competence. Employing the qualitative design, the present research made use of questionnaires and classroom observation. The researcher developed one questionnaire for the teachers and

another for the learners. Both questionnaires contained quite similar questions to make sure the results one obtains are reliable and valid. All things considered, the researcher feels pleased to have contributed a bit to the field of applied linguistics. However, all is not done yet; then, more skilled scientists and scholars could in the future get interested in the field and carry out more striking investigations on this topic.

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